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AN ASSESSMENT OF PUBLIC AND ELITE PERCEPTIONS IN FRANCE, THE UN--ETC(U)

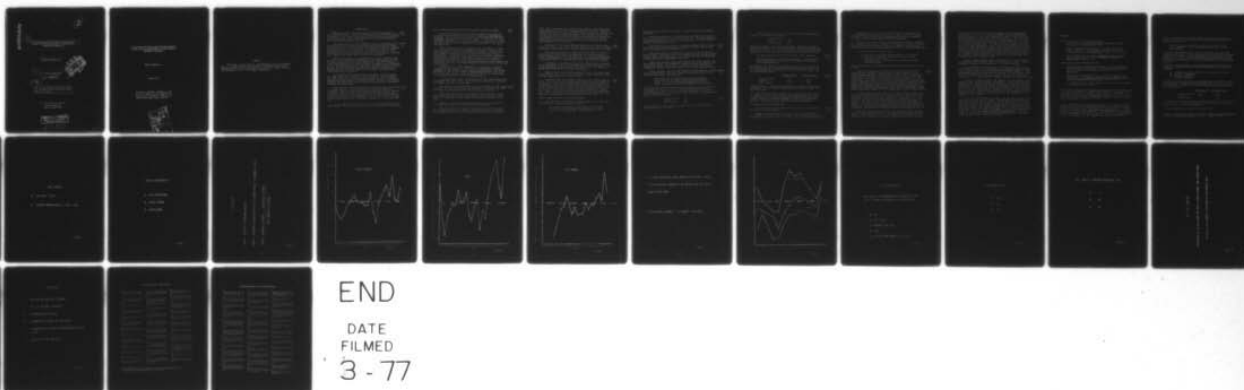
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AN ASSESSMENT OF PUBLIC AND ELITE PERCEPTIONS IN
FRANCE, THE UNITED KINGDOM, AND THE FEDERAL
REPUBLIC OF GERMANY,

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Robert B. Mahoney, Jr.

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AN ASSESSMENT OF PUBLIC AND ELITE PERCEPTIONS IN
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Robert B. Mahoney, Jr.

February 1977

Presented at Conference "Perception of the
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PREFACE

This paper is the text of a presentation given on 21 April 1976 to a DARPA sponsored conference "Perception of the U.S. - Soviet Balance and the Political Uses of Military Power" held at the Washington office of the RAND Corporation.

INTRODUCTION

→ This
My presentation examines elite and public perceptions in three allied nations: the United Kingdom, France, and West Germany. Slide 1
Its purpose is to trace out patterns in public and elite attitudes on
on security issues and to show what implications these patterns
have for American defense policy.

The presentation is based on work conducted independently at Slide 2
the Center for Naval Analyses and the Swedish Institute of Inter- on
national Affairs. It employs USIA poll data and a content analysis
of elite perspectives on the state of East-West tension in Europe
conducted by Dr. Kjell Goldmann of the Swedish Institute.¹ The
elite data covers the period 1946-1970; the USIA polls run from the
late 1950s to the 1970s, with a gap in the mid-1960s.

While the patterns to be presented are fairly reliable indicators of elite and public perspectives, the implications that will be drawn from them will be quite speculative. We do not have a clear understanding of the ways in which attitudes lead to behaviors nor of the ways in which elite and public perceptions affect defense policy. The implications that will be drawn will depend on the assumptions that are made concerning the impact and importance of public and elite perceptions.

One methodological point needs to be made, I will be using the terms 'attitude', 'opinion', and 'perception' interchangeably. All three refer to people's evaluations which we use to formulate expectations concerning their future actions. Further distinctions could be made between the three concepts but they aren't necessary for what I'm doing today.²

The remainder of the presentation is divided into three parts. Slide 3
I'll begin with the elite data derived from the statements of on
government leaders, showing how they perceived the state of tension in Europe. Next will come the USIA data which demonstrates how popular impression of the military balance changed over the period. The final section will be speculative. In it I will set forth some of the implications which I and Kjell Goldmann have drawn from the data.

In the time allotted to me I can't go into methodology in any great detail. Please don't hesitate to raise questions at any point.

ELITE PERCEPTIONS OF THE STATE OF EAST-WEST TENSION IN EUROPE

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on

Goldmann produced the elite data by content analyzing the statement of government leaders found in Keesing's Contemporary Archives. All statements dealing with conflict between the blocs in Europe (and only in Europe) were coded. If more than 15 statements were identified for a given country in a given year, a score (called a 'coefficient of imbalance') was assigned to the nation for that year.

This coefficient can be interpreted as the number of favorable observations regarding the state of East-West relations in Europe minus the number of unfavorable statements, scaled by the total number of observations.³ It ranges from positive one to negative one. A positive score indicates an optimistic assessment of the state of East-West relations or a state of low tension. Note that we are dealing solely with perceptions pertaining to inter-bloc relations in Europe; impressions dealing with matters outside of Europe (e.g., the Middle Eastern conflicts during the period) are excluded.

The validity of using Keesing's as a source was tested by coding data for a number of years from the Department of State Bulletin and the Soviet journal International Affairs. The scores for the U.S. and U.S.S.R computed from Keesing's correlated highly with these test values. Other checks were run on the reliability of the coders who worked with the Keesing's data.

Data was collected for all Warsaw Treaty and NATO nations over the period 1946-1970. Here I will confine my attention to the data for France, the U.K., and the FRG.

The chart on the screen shows the yearly values for the United Kingdom. Positive values index low tension. The dashed line marks the zero point between positive and negative perceptions. Slide 5 on

Note that there are two 'low points' where the most tension was perceived: 1948 and 1961, the years of the two Berlin crises. This is a reasonable finding which increases my confidence in the data.

Secondly, note that there is a positive trend to the data. Over time the perceptions have become more favorable.

This trend is to be expected, given the end of the cold war and the onset of detente. What is significant, however, is when this 'psychological detente' (which can be defined in terms of the

point where the perception scores become positive and remain positive) begins. For the United Kingdom the year is 1963. This is immediately after the Cuban Missile Crisis and the year in which the Limited Test Ban Agreement was signed. This is well before the the major inter-bloc agreements which we date from the first Nixon administration and the Peace Program of the 24th CPSU Congress. Viewed from this perspective the process of detente was already well underway by the mid-1960s.

Turning to the French leader's scores, we can see the same general patterns: low points in 1948 and 1961 and a positive trend over time. The French scores become consistently positive in 1964.

Slide 6
on

Note that the values for 1968 and 1969 go down (as they did in the case of the British), probably due to the Czech crisis. Significantly they do not cross over the zero line to become negative, as happened prior to the mid-1960s. Czechoslovakia appears to have been less of a psychological shock than previous crises.

As before, it is noteworthy that the values become positive in the mid-1960s, despite the Vietnam War and prior to some of the major agreements and events that took place after 1969 that are often used to index the existence of detente.

There is also some national character here: the Gallic temperament holds true to form with the French values being more variable over time than those of the British!

Finally we have the Germans. Note that the values start in 1950. The 1961 value is low and negative, but not as low as might be expected. One curious finding in the data is that the West German leaders made very few statements concerning East-West relations over the period 1960-1962. This might have been one of the ways in which they were responding to (and attempting to manage) the crisis. As before there is an overall positive trend in the data. The values become consistently positive in 1966, going down (but not going negative) with the Czech Crisis in 1968.

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on

PUBLIC PERSPECTIVES ON THE MILITARY BALANCE

I'll now move on the public opinion. From 1957 to 1969, the USIA asked the following question in Europe:

"All things considered, which country do you think is ahead in total military strength at the present time -- the United States or the U.S.S.R.?"

The wording was changed after 1969, so later data will be treated separately.

Taking the responses, the USIA computes a 'Net U.S. Military Standing' by subtracting the percentage who rate the USSR ahead from the percentage who rate the U.S. in first place. Positive scores indicate a perceived U.S. lead.

When we plot the yearly net military standing values for the three nations we see this pattern. Note that a major gap in USIA polling is indexed by the dotted line. Slide 9 on

Once again there is a low point around the time of the 1961 Berlin Crisis. As before there is an upward trend to the data, with a high point in the mid-1960s, a dip around the time of the Czech Crisis, and positive assessments in 1969.

There are definite differences between the three nations; the lines never cross. The Germans are always the most optimistic and the British the most pessimistic. While the levels differ, the patterns are fairly close, particularly for the British and French.

After 1969 this question was dropped from the periodic surveys and new items added. The most recent unclassified survey I have (for 1972) asked the following item: Slide 10 on

"Now, which of the countries on this card would you say is the strongest militarily at the present time: U.S., Soviet Union, Mainland China (PRC), Japan, European Common Market Countries (as a group)?"

Since there are more than two choices the item is not strictly comparable to the earlier results. Nevertheless, publics can still be compared by subtracting those who saw the U.S.S.R. in first place from those who put the U.S. in that position. For the general publics the results were:

United Kingdom	-16
France	+19
West Germany	+19.

Slide 11
on

This is similar to the pattern obtained prior to 1970, with the British being the pessimists.

In the same poll, the results for the college educated were taken out for separate analysis:

United Kingdom	- 1
France	+32
West Germany	+21.

Again the British are the most pessimistic, though to a lesser extent than before. The French and Germans switch positions, but continue to be closer to one another than either is to Britain and continue to be more optimistic regarding the standing of the U.S.

One final question from the 1972 survey bears analysis:

Slide 13
on

"Considering all of the things that make a country strong, what country would you say is the strongest in the world at the present time?"

As before we can subtract the percentage who put the U.S.S.R. in first place from the percentage who ascribe that position to the U.S. Once again we have results for both the general public and for the educated sector:

	<u>General Public</u>	<u>Educated Public</u>
United Kingdom	+17	+23
France	+45	+65
West Germany	+37	+41.

Slide 14
on

Obviously the U.S. fares much better when all bases of power are considered, with the British again being the least favorable and the French most.

When the people who put the U.S. in first place were asked why they did so, the modal response attributed America's lead to economic rather than military factors, though the two were quite close in the case of the West Germans.⁴ This held across both samples: the general public and the educated respondents.

SPECULATIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Any interpretations we make of these patterns are subject to three sets of qualifications.

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on

First, they are based on the past. While it may appear to be reasonable to assume that the patterns have continued in the same general direction, there is no way to be certain that they have.

Secondly, the way in which elite and public opinions affect the defense policy process is not clear. This is one of the basic problems in dealing with the net assessment/perceptions question: we aren't certain how attitudes relate to behaviors.

Thirdly, the patterns deal with two separate things: leader's perceptions of the state of tension in Europe and the public's assessment of the military balance. While both appear to have obvious relevance for the net assessment question, they are separate phenomena.

If we are willing to assume that:

- (1) the past is the best guide we have to the present,
- (2) both sets of perceptions have an impact on the policy process, and
- (3) that both are of relevance for the questions being discussed today.

What speculations can we make concerning their implications for U.S. policy?

The first implication follows from the discovery that the 'psychological detente' among the elites first took hold in the early through mid-1960s. This means that the state of relaxed tensions has been operative for more than a decade. This is not the perspective we get when we focus on the major agreements that have taken place since 1969 (a focus which is particularly strong in some Soviet commentaries but which is also to be found in Western writings). Viewed from this perspective the detente between East and West appears to be somewhat stable (or at least relatively enduring) a conclusion that is reinforced when we recall that the 1968 Czech Crisis did not do serious damage to it for either the elites or mass publics.

Slide 16
on

In this regard, we saw that in the case of public opinion regarding the military balance, each of the publics had its own 'characteristic level' of appraisal. Similarly, each crossed over the threshold of positive elite perceptions in a different year. This suggests that some national characteristics mediate the impact of detente. In terms of U.S. policy this may mean that the impact of some U.S. actions will be limited, since the national factors which account for the differences between the nations are quite likely to be domestic attributes which are not readily manipulable by the U.S.

The third point has to do with the pattern of public opinion concerning the military balance. If the patterns through 1972 still hold, it is possible that U.S. policy makers may encounter a 'boom-erang' effect. Attempts to sensitize European publics to the need

to maintain and increase levels of spending may have detrimental consequences (i.e., lead to reduced support for defense budgets). The effect may be to make the public more aware of their national defense budgets at a time when they perceive a U.S. lead vis a vis the Soviets, which makes their nation's contribution to the common defense effort appear less necessary. The best analogy I can make is to school bond elections. As any school board member can tell you, it is often preferable to have little to no publicity for such elections. The schools will turn out the parents, the clear 'yes' voters. Appeals for public support might 'boomerang' by increasing the turnout of non-parents (who are more likely to vote 'no') and by increasing public awareness of the amount already being spent on the schools. Obviously this point can't be proved from this data, but the danger is a plausible one.

Kjell Goldmann (whose content analysis data I have employed) has conducted more analyses than I have reported on today. Some of Goldmann's findings are relevant for U.S. policy audiences.

Significantly, he contends that since the early 1960s events taking place outside of Europe, except in the Middle East, have had little impact on the tension perceptions of European leaders. This was assessed by doing a more detailed analysis of the tension scores, looking at monthly and quarterly values. He concludes that the Middle East is in some senses an 'adjunct region' for European affairs.

Secondly, Goldmann argues that detente in Europe, while fairly stable to date, needs continued 'nurturing'. He concludes that the maintenance of strategic parity (a condition he dates from the mid-1960s) and the continuation of NATO as a viable alliance contribute to this end. In short, certain U.S. military actions are compatible with (and perhaps necessary for) detente in Europe. Given that his work is done at a Swedish research institute and intended to support Swedish defense policy, it can be used as an independent source of support for U.S. policy.

One final point needs to be noted. We are quite likely to see these two data sets in the future. Richard Merritt, Barry Hughes, and others have carried out analyses of the USIA data prior to the 'gap' in polling in the 1960s.⁵ Since more recent data is again in the public domain, more analyses should appear in the future. Similarly the Goldmann data should be picked up by students of East-West relations. There is already one example of this in Hans Rattinger's recent article in the Journal of Conflict Resolution.⁶ Both are likely to play a major role in public considerations of East-West relations and the net assessment question.

FOOTNOTES

1

The citations for the Goldmann data are:

Kjell Goldmann, Tension and Detente in Bipolar Europe, Stockholm: Esselte Studium, 1974.

Kjell Goldmann, "Research Note: East-West Tension in Europe, 1946-1970: A Conceptual Analysis and a Quantitative Description, World Politics, October 1973, 106-125

Kjell Goldmann and Lars Hall, Spanningen I Europa 1946-1970, Research Report UI-72-3, Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 1972.

The citations for the USIA polls are:

Alvin Richman, "Trends and Structure of Foreign Attitudes Toward the United States and the USSR, paper presented at the 1973 meeting of the American Political Science Association.

United States Information Agency, Office of Research and Assessment, U.S. Standing in Foreign Public Opinion Following the President's Visit to China, R-27-72, 1972.

I am grateful to Dr. Alvin Richman of USIA for his assistance in obtaining the poll data.

2

For further discussion of the ways in which all three concepts can be equated by referring to their common element (the notion of an acquired disposition to respond) consult Donald T. Campbell, "Social Attitudes and other Acquired Behavioral Dispositions", in S. Koch (Ed) Psychology: A Study of a Science, Volume 6, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963, 94-172.

3

This description simplifies matters somewhat. Goldmann employs two scaling methods, the one detailed here and a more complex system which also takes into account the proportion of irrelevant content which is contained in the paragraphs from Keesing's (i.e., content which does not deal with tension). Since the correlation between the two (Goldmann, 1974: 44) is .96, I've chosen to use the simpler of the two formulas for the explanation in this presentation.

Those respondents who indicated that they believed that the U.S. was the strongest country in the world were given the following question to answer:

"What in particular makes you think the United States is the strongest? What do you mean specifically? (Anything else?)"

Along with the question went a set of categories into which the responses were coded. Due to the nature of the item, more than one response was possible. Hence summarizing the percentages in each category (e.g., those who attributed the American lead to military factors plus those who did so for other reasons) would lead to more than 100%.

In spite of this problem we can gain some perspective on the responses by looking at four of the categories used to classify the responses:

- (A) Economic strength, productivity, standard of living;
- (B) Science, technology;
- (C) Military strength;
- (D) Nuclear strength.

By summing the percentages whose responses fell into the first two categories and subtracting the percentages who fell into the final two groupings, economic and military explanations can be compared. The results are:

	<u>Mass Public</u>	<u>Educated Public</u>
United Kingdom	+16	+25
France	+14	+27
West Germany	+ 1	+15.

The Germans rate the two factors (economic and military) more evenly. Elites attach relatively greater weight to economic factors than do mass publics in all three nations.

Further information is contained in USIA R-27-72.

Richard L. Merritt and Donald L. Puchala, Western European Perspectives on International Affairs, New York: Praeger, 1968.

Martin Abravanel and Barry Hughes, "The Relationship between Public Opinion and Governmental Foreign Policy: A Cross-National Study", 107-134 in Patrick J. McGowan (Ed), Sage International Yearbook of Foreign Policy Studies, Volume 1, Beverly Hills: Sage, 1973.

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Hans Rattinger, "Armaments, Detente, and Bureaucracy: The Case of the Arms Race in Europe", Journal of Conflict Resolution, December 1975, 571-595.

AN ASSESSMENT OF PUBLIC AND ELITE PERCEPTIONS IN FRANCE,
THE UNITED KINGDOM, AND WEST GERMANY

ROBERT B. MAHONEY, JR.
CENTER FOR NAVAL ANALYSES

SLIDE 1

DATA SOURCES

- USIA POLLS (1957+)
- GOLDMANN CONTENT ANALYSIS (1946 - 1970)

SLIDE 2

ORDER OF PRESENTATION

- ELITE PERCEPTIONS
- PUBLIC OPINION
- IMPLICATIONS

SLIDE 3

ELITE DATA

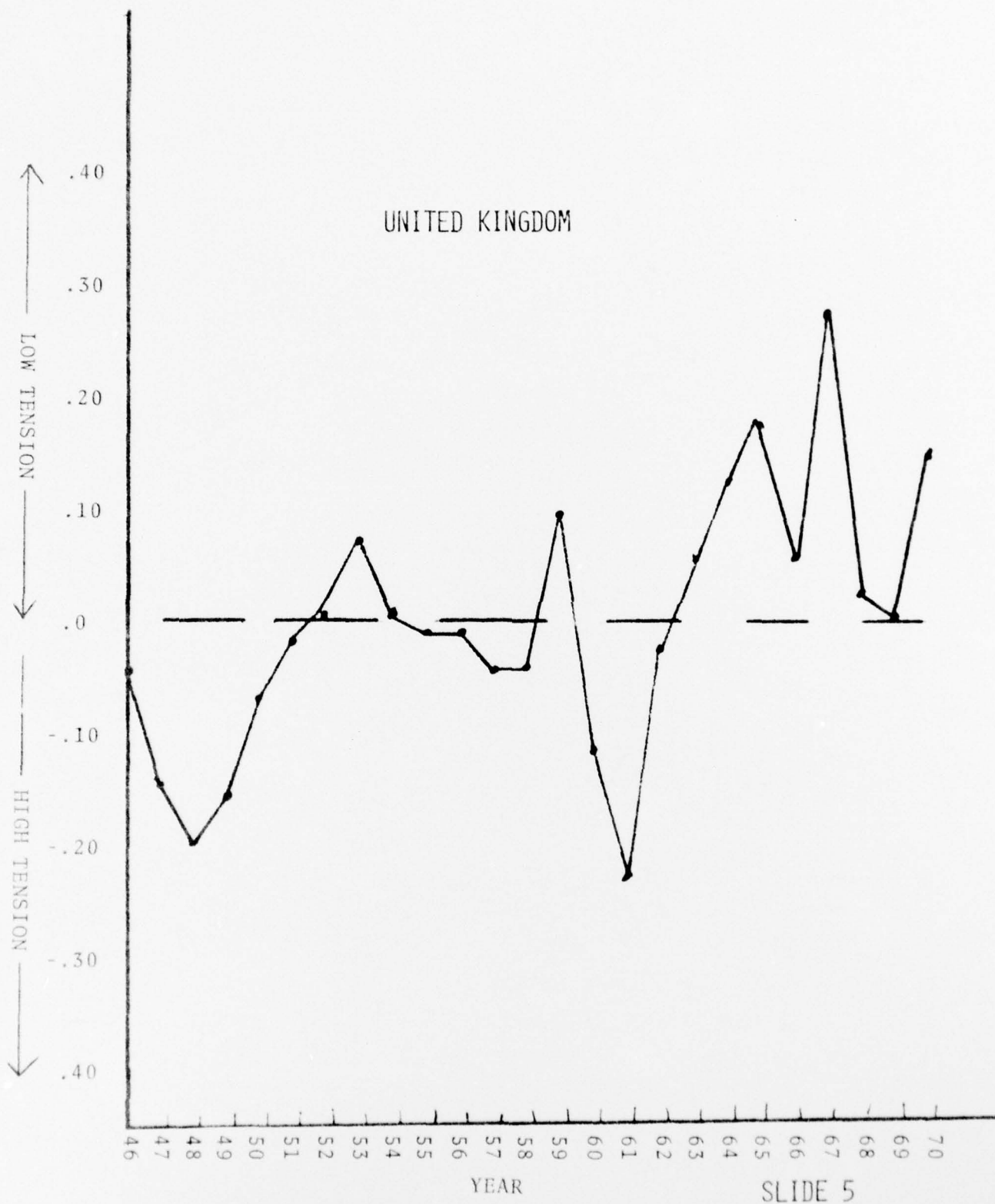
SOURCE: KEESING'S CONTEMPORARY ARCHIVES

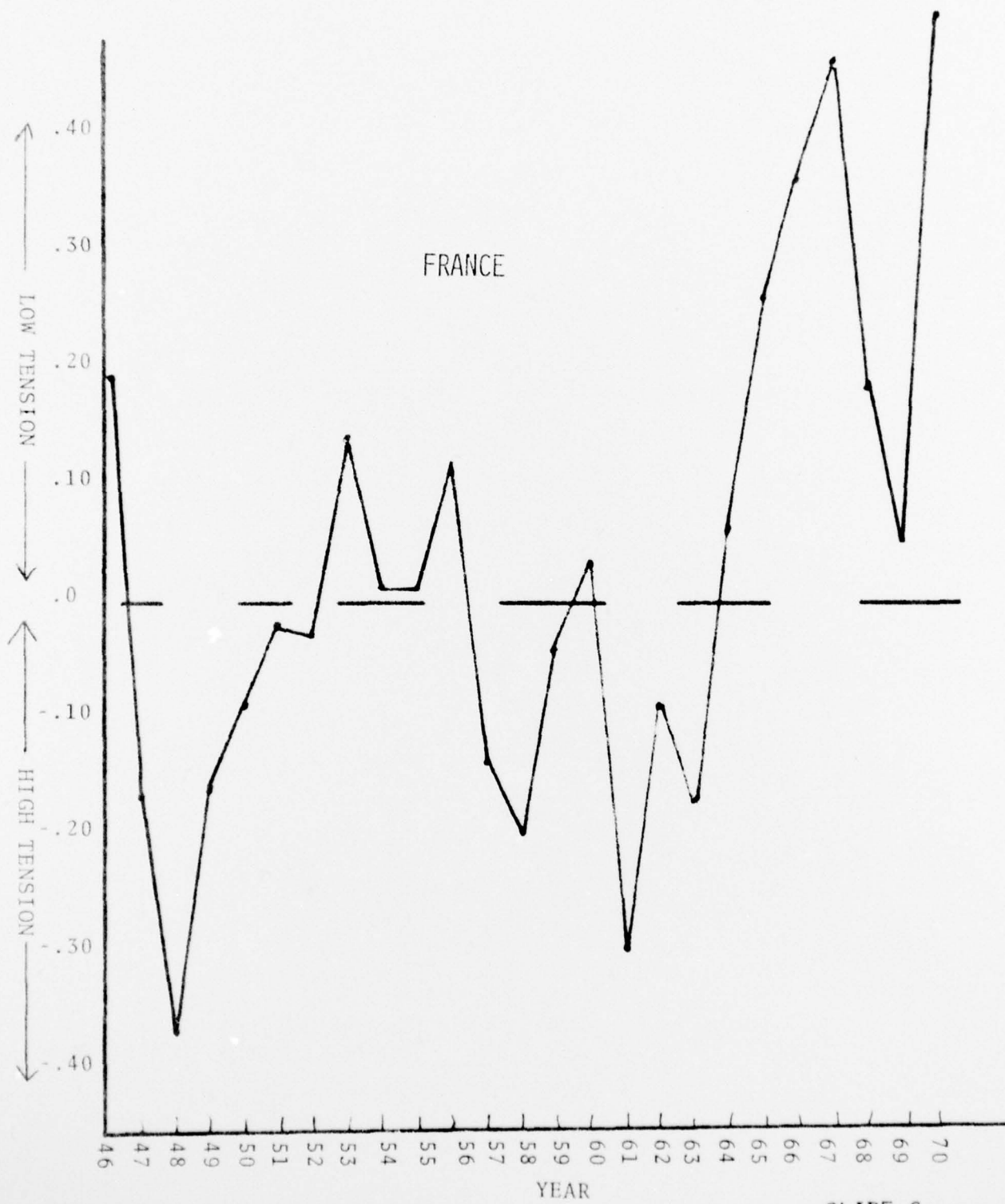
CONTENT: STATEMENTS DEALING WITH EAST-WEST CONFLICT MADE BY GOVERNMENT LEADERS

CODING: FAVORABLE STATEMENTS - UNFAVORABLE STATEMENTS

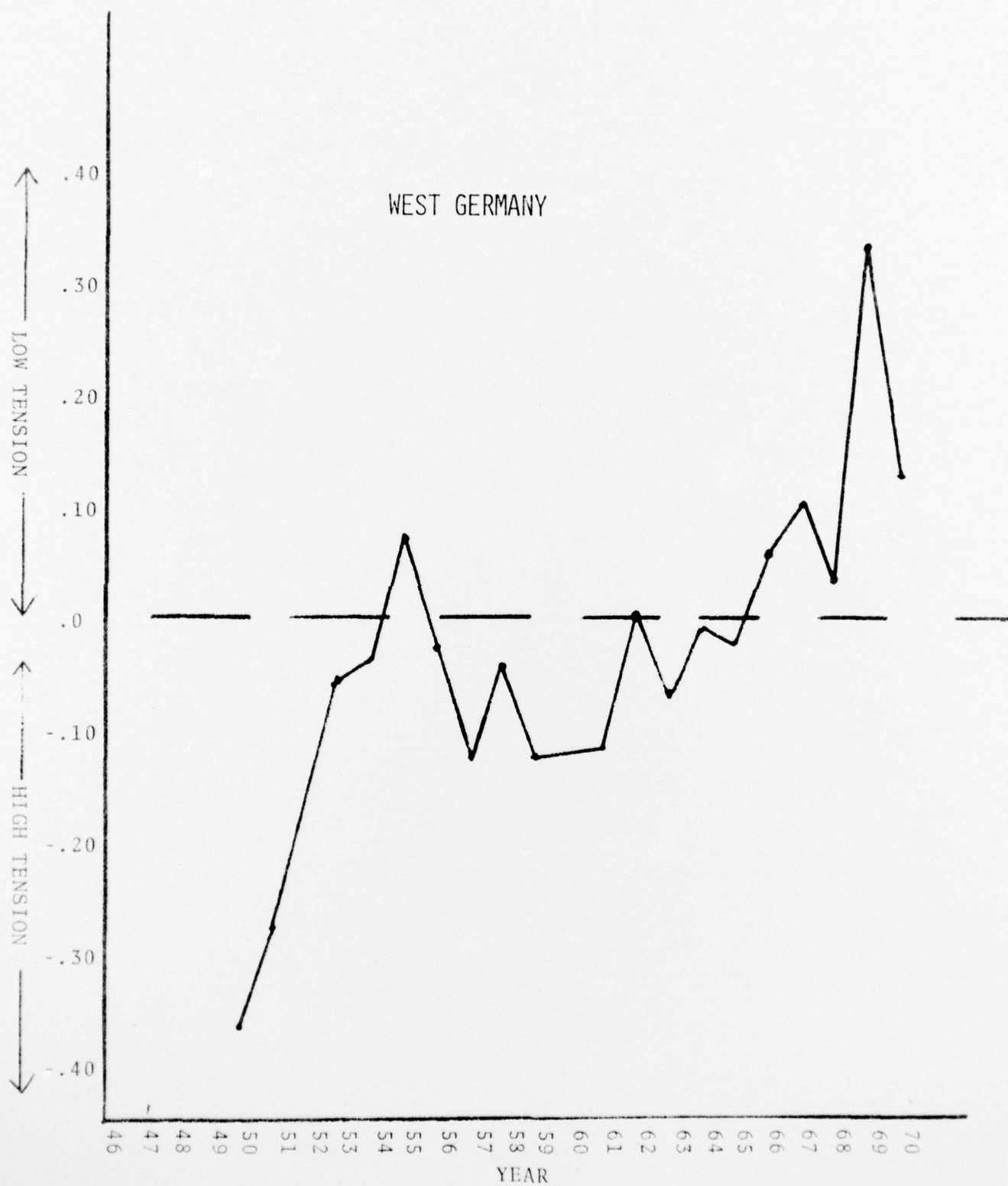
TOTAL NUMBER OF STATEMENTS

SLIDE 4





SLIDE 6

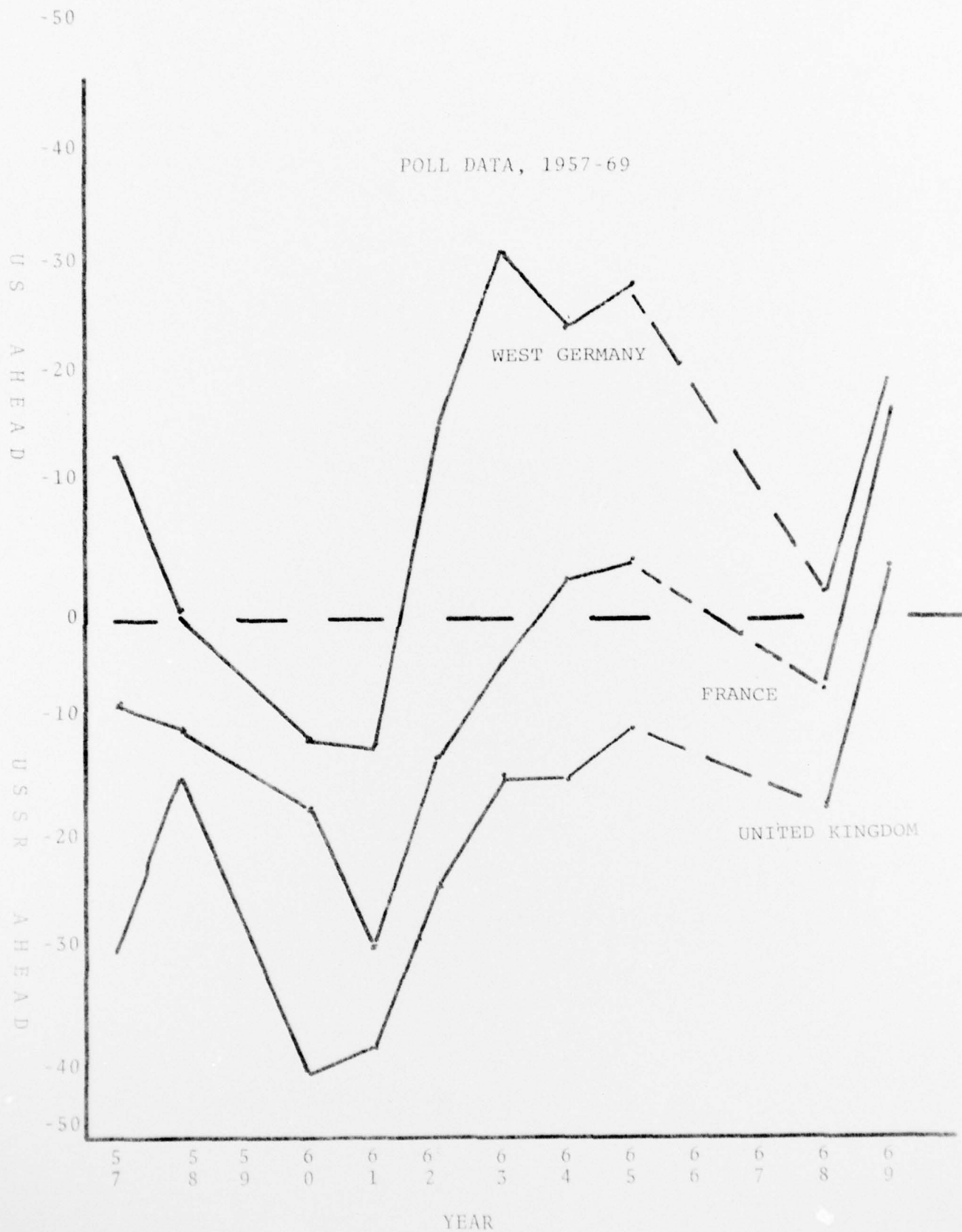


SLIDE 7

ALL THINGS CONSIDERED, WHICH COUNTRY DO YOU THINK IS AHEAD
IN TOTAL MILITARY STRENGTH AT THE PRESENT TIME, THE UNITED
STATES OR THE USSR?

"NET MILITARY STANDING" = U.S. AHEAD - USSR AHEAD

SLIDE 8



SLIDE 9

1972 USIA QUESTION

NOW, WHICH OF THE COUNTRIES ON THIS CARD WOULD YOU
SAY IS STRONGEST MILITARILY AT THE PRESENT TIME:

- U.S.
- SOVIET UNION
- MAINLAND CHINA (PRC)
- JAPAN
- EUROPEAN COMMON MARKET (AS A GROUP)?

SLIDE 10

POLL RESULTS, 1972

UK -16

FR +19

WG +19

SLIDE 11

POLL RESULTS (EDUCATED POPULATION), 1972

UK	-1
----	----

FR	+32
----	-----

WG	+21
----	-----

SLIDE 12

1972 USIA QUESTION

CONSIDERING ALL OF THE THINGS THAT MAKE A COUNTRY STRONG, WHAT COUNTRY WOULD

YOU SAY IS THE STRONGEST IN THE WORLD AT THE PRESENT TIME?

SLIDE 13

1972 USIA GENERAL POWER QUESTION

	<u>GENERAL PUBLIC</u>	<u>EDUCATED PUBLIC</u>
UNITED KINGDOM	+17	+23
FRANCE	+45	+65
WEST GERMANY	+37	+41

SLIDE 14

MAJOR QUALIFICATIONS

1. OUT OF DATE DATA.
2. IMPACT OF PERCEPTIONS NOT CLEAR.
3. TWO SEPARATE PHENOMENA: LEADERS' PERCEPTIONS OF TENSION AND PUBLIC IMPRESSIONS OF THE U.S./SOVIET BALANCE.

SLIDE 15

SPECULATIONS

1. DURATION AND STABILITY OF DETENTE.
2. EFFECT OF NATIONAL DIFFERENCES.
3. PERSUADING ALLIED PUBLICS.
4. GOLDMANN ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND EUROPE.
5. GOLDMANN ON U.S. MILITARY ACTIONS/CAPABILITIES AND
DETENTE.
6. FUTURE USE OF THE DATA SETS.

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